(c) if so, the details of the nations proposed/under consideration?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) India is negotiating Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) nations, the European Communities (EC), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Japan, South Korea and Thailand. The Framework Agreements signed with MERCOSUR (Common Market of the South) in 2003 and Chile in 2005 also stipulate eventual negotiations for Free Trade Agreements.

(b) and (c) The feasibility of having bilateral FTAs is being discussed with China, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia. Russia and a trilateral FTA is being discussed with MERCOSUR and SACU (Southern African Customs Union) jointly.

Delay in Scorpene Submarine project

1708. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether delay in operationalising the Scorpene Submarine project with French collaboration will deplete the present submarine fleet strength to a mere 9 by 2012;

(b) if so, whether Pakistan has already inducted 3 new French Agosta submarines and is accelerating the process of enlarging its submarine fleet;

(c) whether it is also a fact that China has a fleet of 69 submarines with one-third of them being nuclear powered; and

(d) what are the reasons for the delay in the Scorpene project?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) As per current assessment, there is no such delay in operationalising the Scorpene Submarine project.

(b) and (c) Various countries including Pakistan and China, acquire equipment including submarines for modernization of their armed forces depending on their perceived security concerns.

(d) Does not arise.

Operational unpreparedness of Prithvi and Agni Missiles

1709. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:
SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken note of the media reports regarding operational unpreparedness of the indigenously developed Prithvi and Agni missiles;

(b) if so, Government's reaction in this regard;

(c) what steps are being taken to retain operational preparedness;

(d) if not, whether any contradiction to such reports was issued by Government; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) to (e) Information can not be divulged in the interest of National Security.

Remuneration to army *vis-a-vis* GREF officers

1710. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) personnel are being treated as civilians in uniform by the Army;

(b) if not, whether it is necessary to impose Army Act on civilians for working restlessly like Army without pay of that standard;

(c) whether it is also a fact that army officers of equivalent rank are being paid more remuneration for the same type of work/deployment compared to General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) officers; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) Yes, Sir. However, GREF is declared as ''Integral Part of Armed Forces'' only for the purpose of Article 33 of Constitution of India.

(b) The provisions of Army Act 1950 and Army Rules 1954 have been made applicable to GREF personnel *vide* SRO No.329 and 330 both dated 23rd September 1960 for the purpose of discipline only.

(c) and (d) The remuneration paid to GREF and Army Officers is different as the terms and conditions of service, criteria for promotion and rank structure of the Army are different from those for GREF.

Medical coverage to GREF/BRO personnel

1711. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether medical coverage to GREF/BRO personnel is similar to Army or Central Government employees;

(b) if it is like Central Government employees how many personnel are availing CGHS facilities and at how many places this facility is provided; and

(c) if it is like the Army, how many people are treated in Army hospitals?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) GREF personnel are governed by CS (Medical Attendance) Rules, 1944. At present CGHS facilities are available only in major cities of the country. Since most of GREF Projects/Units are deployed in remote/field areas where Civil Hospitals with specialized treatment